

**"A Learning Paper"**

# **Creating Effective District Professional Development Plans**

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3500 Sunrise Highway

Great River, NY 11730

[www.MyLearningPlan.com](http://www.MyLearningPlan.com)

[Learn@MyLearningPlan.com](mailto:Learn@MyLearningPlan.com)

800.287.4432



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## INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, school district leaders are thinking about how to provide focused, systemic professional learning opportunities to support ongoing growth of all staff and increased student achievement. Pick up almost anything about professional development from the national education organizations, including NSDC, ASCD, NCTM, AFT, NSF, the US Department of Education and State Departments of Education, and it's hard to miss the strong message about moving beyond preference-based menus to more strategic, targeted long term professional learning paths grounded in content. One related aim is to provide sustained settings where educators can collaboratively and continuously enhance their knowledge and/or implementation skills that directly relate to identified student performance needs based on multiple data points.

To support this kind of focused, ongoing, job-embedded professional development, MyLearningPlan (MLP)<sup>1</sup> provides a Professional Development Plan (PD Plan) template that helps districts to establish and document their primary professional learning initiatives as one or more electronic "plans." Each plan may include a purpose, rationale, student and teacher learning goals, and formal and informal professional learning opportunities tied to impact assessment measures. Data from all of the activities within a plan can be reported on collectively. Districts may use PD Plans to support ongoing programs, in addition to or instead of, providing individual, unrelated offerings. Killion (2007) states: "In reality staff development is ongoing learning that continues without end..." The PD Plan assists leaders in clarifying a district's primary, long-term professional learning initiatives, including specifying learning paths that are differentiated by role, such as teachers, para-professionals, coaches, or administrators.

The purpose of this paper is to support instructional leaders in maximizing their investment in MLP and overall PD expenditures, through the use of PD Plans and related data collection, organization, and reporting capabilities. We hope that these ideas will help leaders to clarify and document their current initiatives in MLP, in order to effectively monitor and report on the plans or to assist in refining thinking about establishing new plans.

MLP is a Professional Development Management and Evaluation System (PDMES), and it differs from a traditional PDMS in that the evaluation component of MLP brings data gathering full-circle by enabling district leaders to substantiate their investments in professional development.

The "PD Plan Model" (Figure 1) highlights the typical data sources that inform the creation of PD Plans, and represents some of the possible adult learners who may participate. The horizontal arrows indicate that a plan can include professional development experiences and related evaluation measures at the Knowledge, Application, and Impact levels.

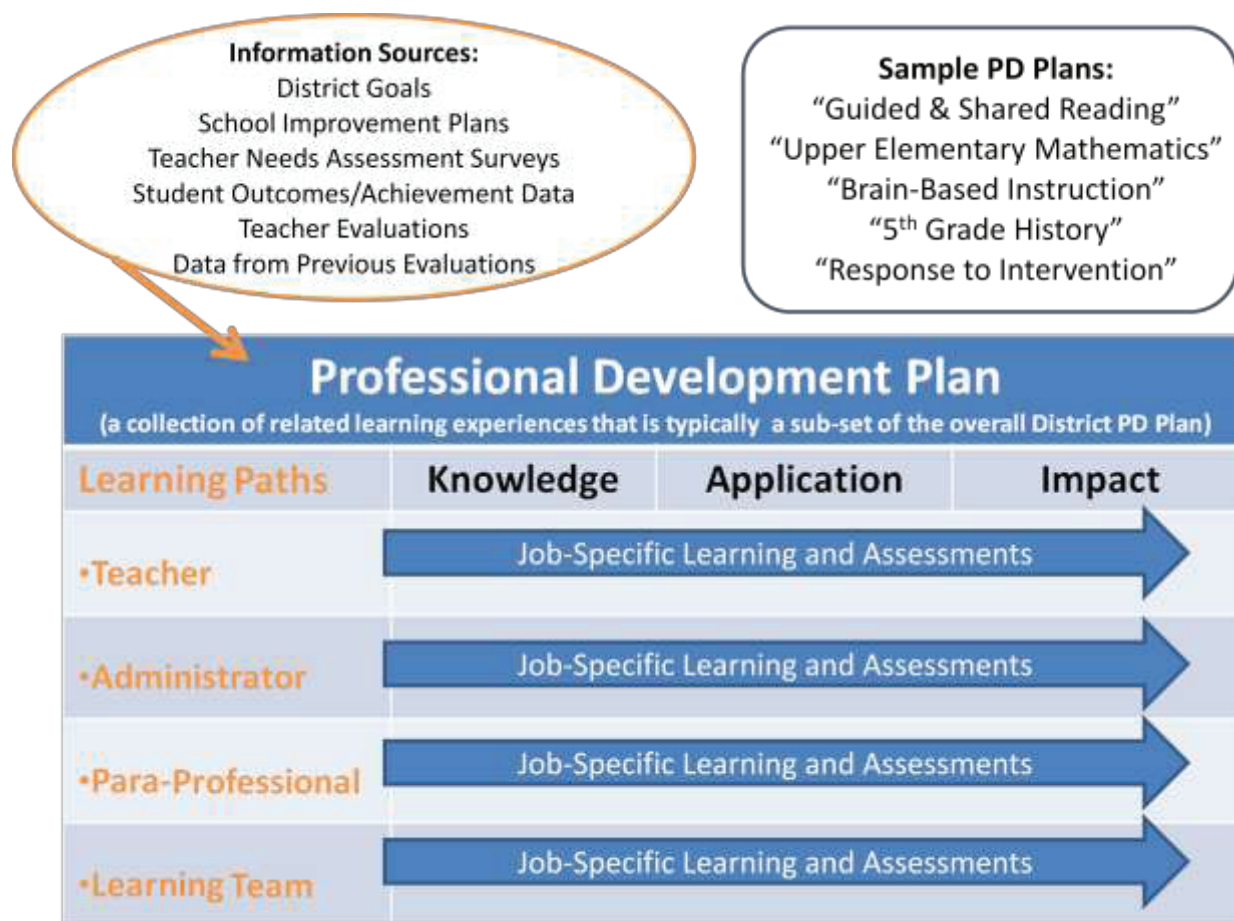


Figure 1: PD Plan Model

## CONSIDERATIONS

### I. OVERVIEW

In theory, there are a few strategic district goals, often organized around desired student achievement outcomes that are the drivers for all professional learning within a district. Based on these district goals, collaborative conversations among instructional leaders determine the district-wide professional development initiatives that are necessary to help the educators in the district achieve the student goals. Then, each "job-alike" group participates in a related series of professional learning experiences that are specifically tailored for their roles and designed to help each team do their part in reaching the district goals. In their daily practice, participants apply the knowledge and skills that they are developing, collaboratively analyze the results, and refine their methods, and ultimately student performance increases. In the background, leaders easily monitor each of the strategic PD Plans to understand progress and obstacles based on a variety of data points, which enables them to responsively make adjustments to each plan on an ongoing, as needed basis.

In reality, this picture may represent a viable vision, but it may be confounding to imagine how to get there from the current environment. Instituting a titanic shift from choice-based professional development to establishing and maintaining a tight, data-driven PD focus is a cultural, sea-change in some districts. Formulating, publishing, and managing PD Plans based around the suggested considerations below can be one simple, yet valuable mechanism to help turn the proverbial ship.

#### A. Purpose/Description:

Before jumping into the particulars, for each PD Plan it is useful to think about why the Plan exists or why it is necessary. Crafting a few sentences around what the Plan is trying to accomplish is a way of stating the purpose and providing a brief description.

*Why does this Plan exist?*

## **B. Target Learners:**

Next, specify the different groups that will take part in the plan. For example, to attain a district goal related to student literacy, a district may create a PD Plan around Guided and Shared Reading that includes three types of learners: teachers, para-professionals, and principals. While everyone that is part of this Plan may participate in some of the same learning opportunities, each group may engage in other experiences that are more job-specific. For example, while teachers learn about how to organize their classroom time around multiple reading groups, para-professionals may be engaged in different learning around how to work with the rest of the class or individual students, while principals gain insights about what to look for during walkthroughs. These different adult learning paths, structured by job-alike groups, can be easily specified as part of coherent PD Plans that address the district's overall literacy goal.

*Which groups will participate as learners in this plan?*

## **C. Duration:**

The flexible nature of the PD Plan template facilitates the creation of plans that span several weeks, months, an entire school year or multiple years. There may be good reason to create shorter or longer-term plans to meet certain needs. Some thought should be done around the duration of each plan given the purpose and goals that it is meant to attend to.

*Over what period of time will the plan be implemented?*

## **D. Contact Person:**

Ideally, Professional Development leaders work in partnership with curriculum leads to identify the handful of PD Plans that are required to meet district goals, perhaps on an annual basis or as the district goals evolve. In addition, it is important to designate the primary sponsor or "champion" of each plan. Typical responsibilities for this person may include:

- determining what learning experiences are needed to achieve the plan goals,

- monitoring progress data that is gathered during plan implementation,
- examining information that is collected to modify implementation, and
- analyzing summative data to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan in terms of job specific application of new knowledge and the associated impacts on student learning.

*Who is primarily responsible for the implementation, and ultimately, the success of this plan?*

## II. RATIONALE

The supporting information that provides the basis for the plan should be considered holistically, and recorded to serve as a foundation on which to base other key decisions about the plan goals, learning experiences or assessment measures.

### A. Baseline Student Data:

Review any assessment data from standardized tests, benchmark assessments, products from teacher-created assessments, or other sources to determine the target student population that the plan is intended to reach through the educators who work with them. Note important quantitative and/or anecdotal data that represents the students' current levels of understanding or achievement in the content and/or pedagogical areas addressed in the plan. Begin to think about what combination of professional development opportunities will most effectively help educators address those needs.

*What do the data suggest about student learning needs?*

### B. Educator Needs Assessment Data:

There are a number of ways that the results from needs assessment surveys can inform district PD Plans. For example, a symptom such as a desire for increased collegial conversation may indicate a need for additional common planning time that

could be addressed in part with an online TeamRoom or an expressed lack of interest in teaching a particular concept may be translated into a need for professional development that deepens teachers' content knowledge. Data from needs assessment surveys may also help to shape the professional learning designs that are selected for the activities that will populate the plans. Incorporating needs assessment results in visible, and appropriate ways, can also engender increased commitment to new approaches to professional learning. While seeking ways to utilize stakeholder input, it is critical to maintain a clear alignment to the district goals and baseline student data.

*What do the data suggest in terms of educator learning needs?*

### **C. Results from Previous Plans:**

If it is possible to access historical data from previous plans, whether they were entered into a PDMES or not, it often makes sense to look at implementation and outcome data. Identify the extent to which the plan goals were met and any apparent success factors. In retrospect, consider how appropriate the learning experiences were in terms of reaching the plan goals, as well any perceptual data from online discussions, reflective logs, and summary forms that may be useful in forming appropriate expectations for application and student impact as part of new plans. If certain activities or "learning designs" (Brown Easton, 2008) were more effective than others, think about the applicability of those formats for other purposes. If the outcome data was not in a form that is useful or was not an appropriate mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence, determine if there other indicators or assessment measures that might be more effective to utilize this time around.

*What are the significant insights from previous plans that can be applied? What will you be sure to include or do differently in this plan?*

### III. READINESS

In this context, "readiness" describes the understandings and attitudes, context, and resources that should be considered as a foundation for writing goals for any PD Plan.

#### A. Pre-Requisite Knowledge:

The best laid plans may be only mildly successful if they do not meet participants where they are. To assure that plan goals make sense and are achievable within the given context, systematically surface and think through any assumptions about the expected backgrounds or pre-requisite knowledge and skills of the target participants. As part of developing professional learning experiences, instructional designers might also plan for how background knowledge will be efficiently activated and leveraged.

*Do the target participants have the background knowledge and skills necessary to build on throughout this plan?*

#### B. Level of Staff Compliance/Commitment:

If the plan embodies a substantial change in the way that stakeholders are comfortable learning, it's wise to anticipate the range of reactions from the participants. If the sense is that the group(s) will be less than fully committed, contemplate the variables that may be influenced. Think concretely about how educators can be empowered to take on individual responsibility for the results of the plan through application and impact forms. Consider methods for recognizing individual and group achievements, and demonstrating that participant efforts matter, perhaps through targeted comments in online TeamRooms.

*What steps can be taken to encourage staff to develop greater commitment to the plan?*

#### C. Settings/Learning Formats:

To create a viable plan, take into account the settings that have been established within which meaningful, continuous professional learning can occur.

Settings or learning formats might include scheduled PD days, grade level team meetings, online courses, staff meetings, book study groups, collegial circles, or lesson study groups.

*What settings or learning formats are available and stable to support the plan?*

#### **D. Personnel:**

In addition to the "owner," think about who will be enlisted to support or contribute to the development and monitoring of this Plan. In addition, ponder what will happen to the plan if there are personnel changes among leaders during plan implementation. Think about ways to mitigate that possibility.

*How can you distribute leadership and accountability for the plan's success?*

#### **E. Finances:**

If necessary, determine what fiscal resources can be applied to support the plan, and whether or not a simple budget is needed. Factor any anticipated expenses for consultants, stipends, substitutes or travel.

*Are there any projected expenses associated with the plan? How will these be funded?*

## **IV. PLAN GOALS**

Following the backward design approach, and keeping in mind that student and adult learners represent their understanding in a variety of ways, draft goals with embedded and summative assessment measures in mind before identifying the specific professional learning experiences through which the goals will be achieved. Just as "we [teachers] cannot say *how* to teach or *which* material and activities to use until we are quite clear about which specific understandings we are after and what such understandings look like in

practice," (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) the same holds for adult learning.

### **A. Alignment to District Goals:**

If a PD Plan is derived from district goals, then identifying the alignment should be fairly straight-forward. In addition to indicating which goal(s) the plan supports, it is also recommended to consider how the plan will address the specified goal(s) either directly or indirectly.

*How will the plan support one or more district goals?*

### **B. Student S.M.A.R.T. Goals:**

Best practice suggests defining the student goals before educator learning goals because the teacher learning should focus on the knowledge and implementation the content and procedural skills necessary to attain the student goals. Using the S.M.A.R.T. guidelines popularized by Richard and Becky Dufour, ensure that your goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Oriented, and Time-Bound.

*What will students know or be able to do as a result of this plan?*

### **C. Educator Learning Goals:**

Determine the intended results for participating educators. The desired outcomes may be demonstrated as changes in job-specific knowledge (and possibly attitudes, skills, and beliefs, per Killion, 2007) and practice. As part of this thinking, consider how achievement of the stated educator learning goals will directly translate or lead to reaching the student goals. Mapping the expected changes to show the anticipated alignment between educator changes in practice and student learning changes may also be useful. A sample table is included in the Appendix.

*What types of changes in educator practice are expected to help students realize the stated S.M.A.R.T. goals?*

## V. LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND ASSESSMENT

This section is the core of the plan, and although represented linearly here, real life tells us that constructing new knowledge, applying that learning in the classroom, and detecting evidence of student impact unfold in a more fluid, and often overlapping manner. The purpose of thinking in a specified order is to organize the plan around the expected cause and effect relationship, and to identify how evaluation data will be collected at each stage. The "Assessment Flow" (Figure 2) includes the corresponding MLP assessment tools that are available to support data collection at each level.

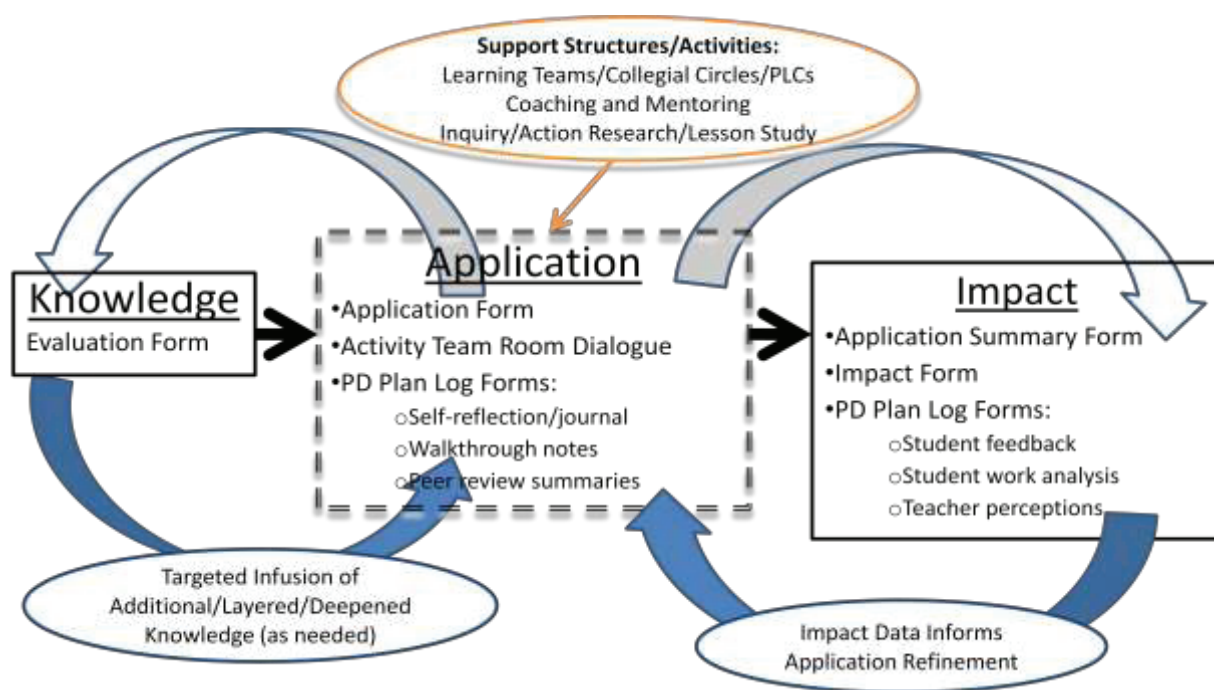


Figure 2: Learning and Assessment Flow

**A. Knowledge Level Activities and Evaluation Data:**

Determine the types of learning opportunities that will be occur to support the plan. Think through how independent projects, team learning, and external forms of PD may be integrated, in addition to district-sponsored sessions. In addition, plan how knowledge will be assessed through online evaluation forms and possibly other tools. Consider whether a generic evaluation form would be most appropriate or if an activity-specific form or a content-specific form would most efficiently gather the desired information. Take into account any variance needed in evaluation forms for general pedagogical plans as compared to content-based plans.

*What learning opportunities will be provided or may be initiated to achieve the Plan goals, and how will construction or acquisition of new knowledge be evaluated?*

**B. Application Support and Evaluation Data:**

It's never too early to pinpoint the measures and tools that will be used to gather evidence of classroom application of new knowledge and skills. In addition, it is critical to provide scaffolding and support for participants who are working to make changes in their practice. Review the settings and support structures that are available in your district to reinforce knowledge and to support collaborative planning and reflection, such as PLCs or learning teams, coaching, mentoring, study groups or action research. Think about when it will be appropriate to begin gathering information about participants' application of their learning. Consider using Application forms for educators to indicate the types of practice-based changes that they are trying to make and what measures will provide evidence that changes in practice are taking place. A plan may also include tools such as a Log form for regular reflective journaling, as well as TeamRooms for online threaded discussion and file sharing, in order to scaffold application and continued learning, and to facilitate collaboration during the application period.

*How will plan participants track their application work?*

*Which forms, tools or questions might be employed to easily document the application process?*

### C. Impact Evaluation Data:

An essential plan component is identifying how achievement of the student S.M.A.R.T. goals will be evaluated. It may make sense to allow some time to elapse for cycles of planning, application, and reflection to occur before starting to collect evidence of impact. Think about when it would be appropriate to look at student indicators of learning and changes from the baseline data, and note which of the Application level tools might be useful to also evaluate student impact. Many of the same tools in MyLearningPlan, such as Team Rooms and Log forms, can be used to collect evidence of both application and impact by just modifying the questions. Weigh the benefits of building in formative measures as well as noting summative tools, such as classroom-created assessments, test scores or portfolios of student work. Review a sample Impact form to determine if that tool would be useful to collect evidence of outcomes. Determine how the entire plan will be evaluated and results disseminated.

*How will evidence of student impact be collected and analyzed?*

*How will the plan as a whole be evaluated and how will results be shared?*

## VI. REFLECTION AND GENERATION

After the plan has been fully implemented, indicate the level progress towards attainment of the plan goals and the actual results data, and identify any important factors that contributed to those outcomes. Record the significant learning that can be applied to the creation of future plans. Make time to facilitate collaborative reflection and sharing about the content, process and context of the experience in its totality to glean insights about all aspects of the plan. Perhaps initiate a specific TeamRoom post for this purpose. In addition, determine how the leadership team will use the data collected to generate and disseminate reports to inform future decision-making. MLP enables the use of multiple tools or measures to draw from, yet the electronic report-writer allows leaders to amass all of the data in a single, simple interface for efficient analysis. Review sample reports in the Appendix to gain ideas for how data may be organized and interpreted.

*Were the PD Plan Goals met?*

*What were the important factors that contributed to this result?*

*What was the most significant learning that will be applied to future plans?*

## PLANNING MATRIX

The Planning Matrix below is designed to facilitate PD Plan development through distributed responsibility. The primary plan "owner" might share this tool to invite other leaders to participate in collecting the deliverables or pieces of information needed to build a cohesive and effective PD Plan.

### OVERVIEW

#### PURPOSE / DESCRIPTION

Why does this plan exist?

#### TARGET LEARNERS

Which groups will participate as learners in this plan?

#### DURATION

Over what period of time will this plan be implemented?

#### CONTACT PERSON

Who is responsible for the implementation, and ultimately, the success of this plan?

## **RATIONALE**

### **ALIGNMENT TO DISTRICT GOALS**

How will this plan support one or more district goals?

### **BASELINE STUDENT DATA**

What do the data suggest about student learning needs?

### **EDUCATOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT DATA**

What do the data suggest in terms of educator learning needs?

### **RESULTS FROM PREVIOUS PLANS**

What are the significant insights from previous plans that can be applied?  
What will you be sure to include or do differently in this plan?

## READINESS

### PRE-REQUISITE KNOWLEDGE

Do the target participants have the background knowledge and skills necessary to build from throughout this plan?

### LEVEL OF STAFF COMPLIANCE / COMMITMENT

What steps can be taken to encourage staff towards greater commitment to the plan?

### SETTINGS/LEARNING FORMATS

What settings or learning formats are available and stable to support the plan?

### PERSONNEL

How can you distribute leadership and accountability for the plan's success?

### FINANCES

Are there any projected expenses associated with the plan?  
How will these be funded?

## PLAN GOALS

### DISTRICT GOAL ALIGNMENT

How will the plan support one or more district goals?

### STUDENT S.M.A.R.T GOALS

What will students know or be able to do as result of this plan?

### EDUCATOR LEARNING GOALS

What types of changes in practice are expected to help students realize the S.M.A.R.T. goals?

## **LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND ASSESSMENT**

### **KNOWLEDGE LEVEL ACTIVITIES AND EVALUATION DATA**

What learning opportunities will be provided or may be initiated to achieve the plan goals, and how will construction or acquisition of new knowledge be evaluated?

### **APPLICATION SUPPORT AND EVALUATION DATA**

How will plan participants track their application work?  
Which forms, tools or questions might be employed to easily document the application process?

### **IMPACT EVALUATION DATA**

How will evidence of student impact be collected and analyzed?  
How will the plan as whole be evaluated and how will results be shared?

## **REFLECTION AND GENERATION**

Were the PD Plan Goals met?

What are the outcome data?

What were the important factors that contributed to this result?

What was the most significant learning that will be applied to future plans?

## APPENDIX

The "Type of Change Table" (Figure 3) provides a concrete example of how teacher learning can impact student results.

TYPE OF CHANGE	TEACHERS	STUDENTS
<b>KNOWLEDGE</b> Conceptual understanding of information, theories, principles, and research	Teachers understand mathematical concepts they are responsible for teaching.	Students have a deeper understanding of key mathematical concepts measured on criterion referenced test.
<b>ATTITUDE</b> Beliefs about the value of particular information or strategies	Teachers believe students' competence in mathematics is important to their success both within and beyond school.	Students enjoy mathematics.
<b>SKILL</b> The ability to use strategies and processes to apply knowledge	Teachers know how to employ a variety of instructional strategies to help students visualize mathematical concepts	Students demonstrate their understanding of math on classroom performance tasks.
<b>ASPIRATION</b> Desires, or internal motivation, to engage in a particular practice	Teachers have a genuine desire for students to understand and perform well in mathematics.	Students want to advance their understanding of mathematics and aspire to advanced work in mathematics.
<b>BEHAVIOR</b> Consistent application of knowledge and skills	Teachers consistently employ inquiry-based instructional practices in mathematics to help students acquire a deep understanding of math concepts.	Students regularly apply mathematical reasoning to solving problems in math other areas of the curriculum.

**Figure 3:** Types of Changes in Teachers and Students: A Mathematics Example (Killion, 2007, p. 38).

The images that follow (Figures 4-8) represent screens from the Manage PD Plan feature, which is the reporting piece that allows leaders to access a variety of data types and reports from across all of the activities in a Plan from a single dashboard. These high level statistics provide formative data to support progress monitoring during plan implementation. Other more detailed reports that include the content entered into any forms may also be generated through My Reports.

Figure 4 below is an example of a "PD Plan Summary" view, which provides a high level, at-a-glance overview of the number of users actively working at each level within the Plan based on the forms that have been submitted at each level: Knowledge, Application, and Impact.

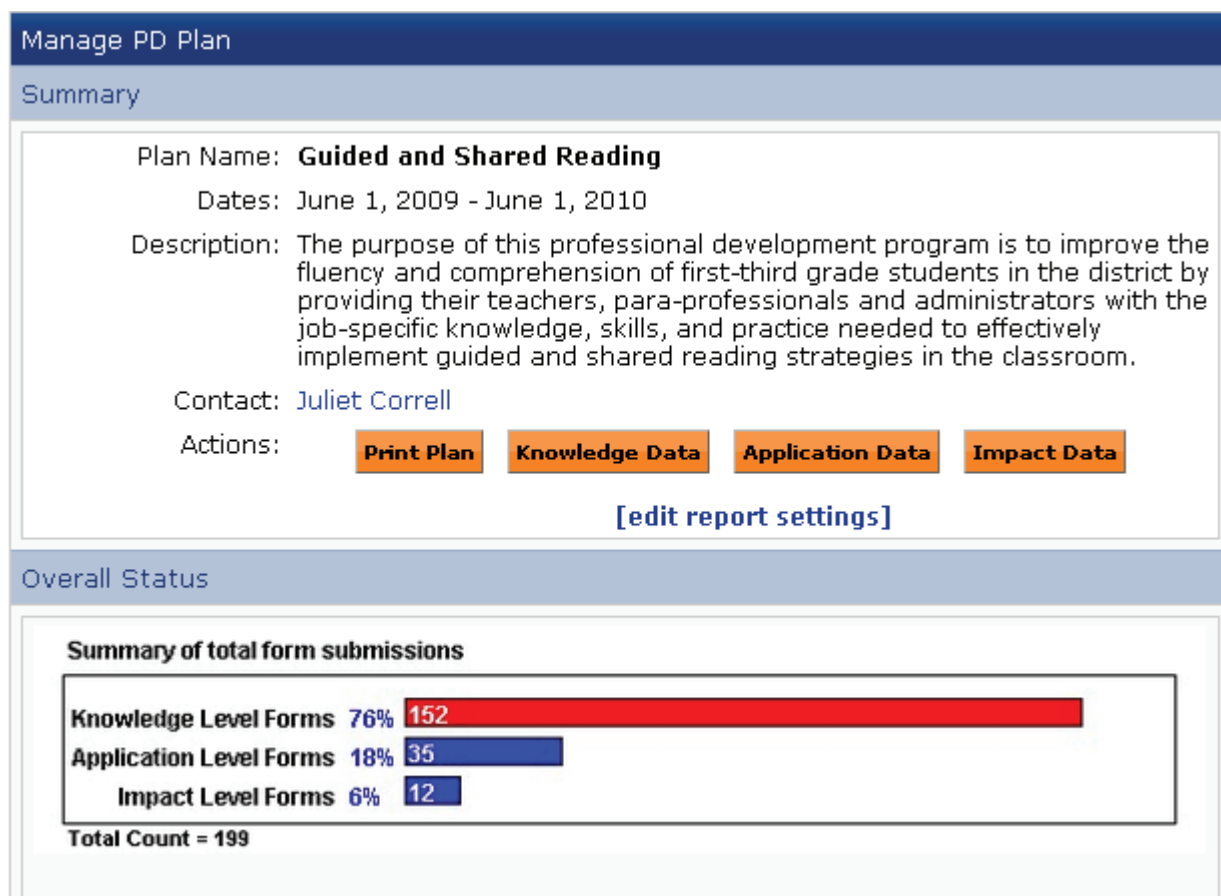


Figure 4: PD Plan Summary View

The "Knowledge Level Statistics" (Figure 5) show the number of users working towards each of the plan's educator learning goals and the associated hours and credits if applicable. This view also indicates the total number of Knowledge level request forms (or regular activity request forms) that have been submitted for activities that are part of the plan.

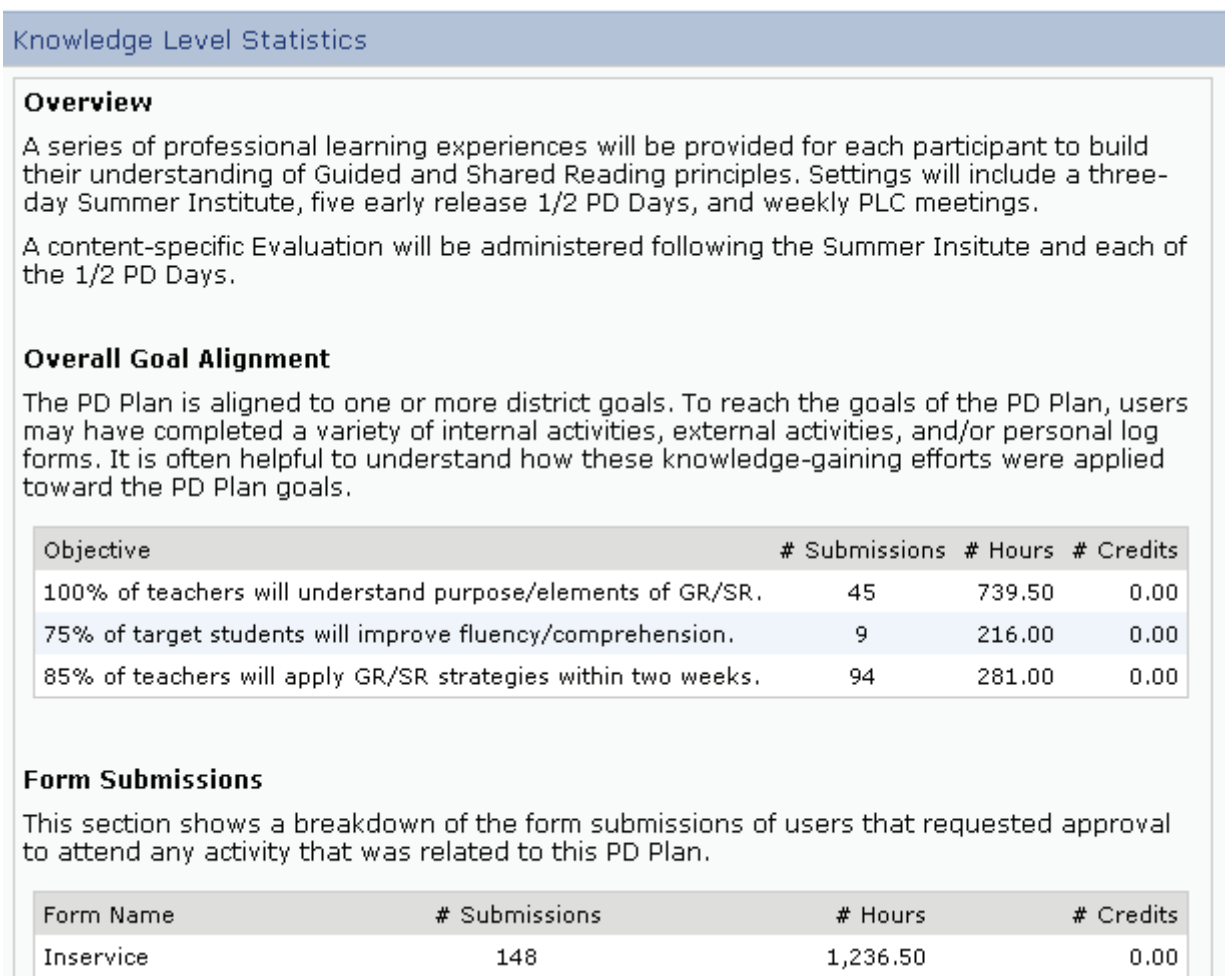


Figure 5: Knowledge Level Statistics

The "Application Level Statistics – Part I" (Figure 6) offers another view of application and impact data, including percentage increases in student outcomes by type of change in educator practice.

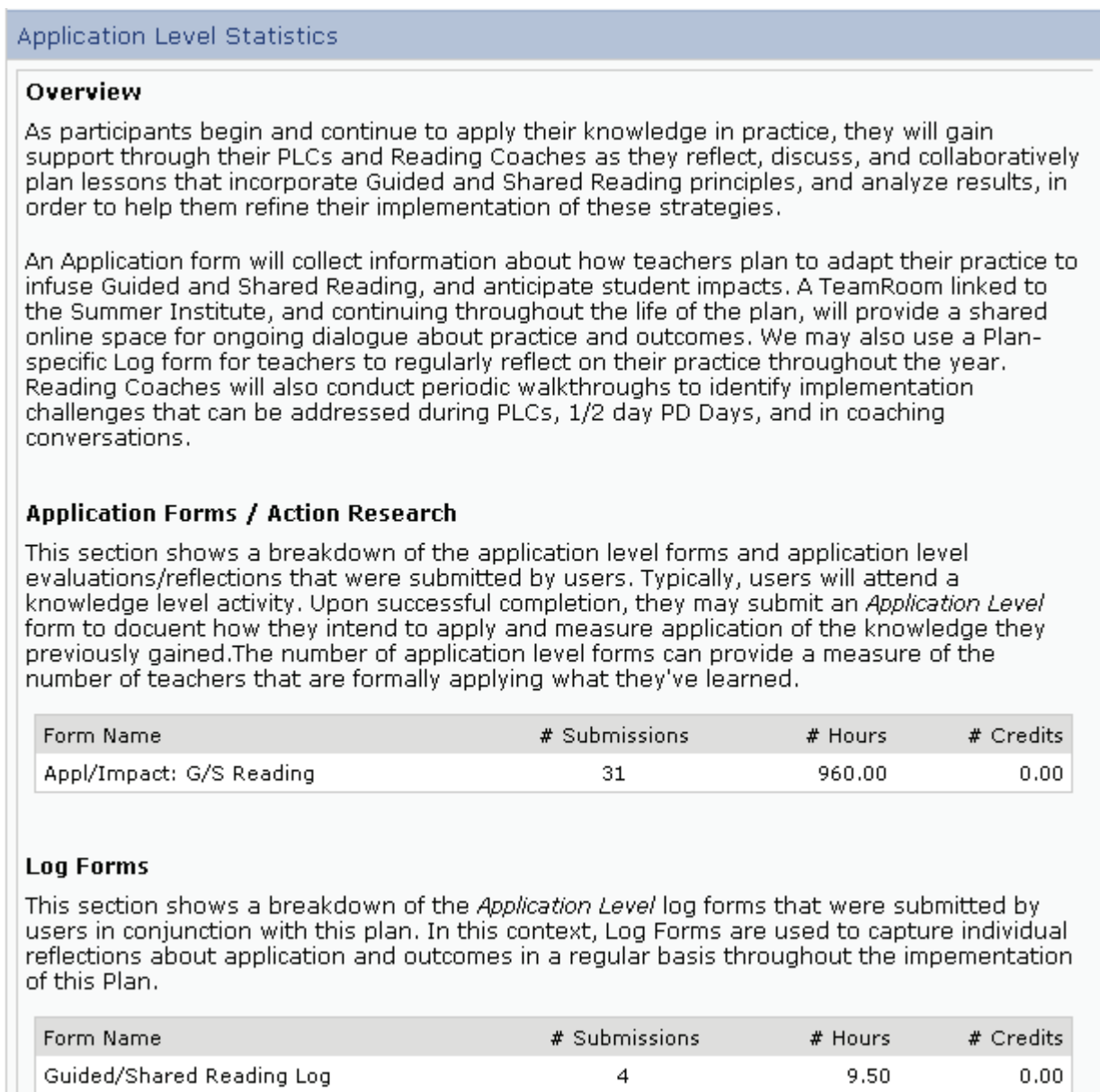


Figure 6: Application Level Statistics – Part I

The Application Level Stats – Part II" (Figure 7) provides a summary of Team Room participation for all Team Rooms that are active within a plan, as well as a central place to access all evaluation data for plan activities.

### Teamroom Participation

This section shows a breakdown of the TeamRoom topics and comments posted for all activities within this Plan that have active TeamRooms. These threaded discussions can be a rich collaboration tool, and given specific, deliberate prompts, the asynchronous conversations can provide one qualitative source of information about what knowledge is being applied in practice and the results of those application efforts.

Activity Title	# Participants	# Topics	# Threads
Introduction to Guided Reading	22	6	6
G/S Reading: Kennedy 1st Grade PLC	9	11	11
MLP Academy	7	1	1

### Activity Evaluations

Evaluations can be a useful tool to support reflection on knowledge, application efforts, and resulting student impact.

Activity Title	# Participants	# Responses
A: G/S Reading: PD Day 2***CANCELLED***	0	0
G/S Reading: PD Day 1	30	5
G/S Reading: PD Day 2	17	0
G/S Reading: PD Day 3	15	0
G/S Reading: PD Day 4	11	0
G/S Reading: PD Day 5	21	0
G/S Reading: Summer Institute	38	7

Figure 7: Application Level Statistics – Part II

Figure 8 offers a glimpse at the "Impact Level Statistics" that are collected through the Manage PD Plan feature. More detailed reports that include the actual data entered into forms can be generated through the regular Report Writer.

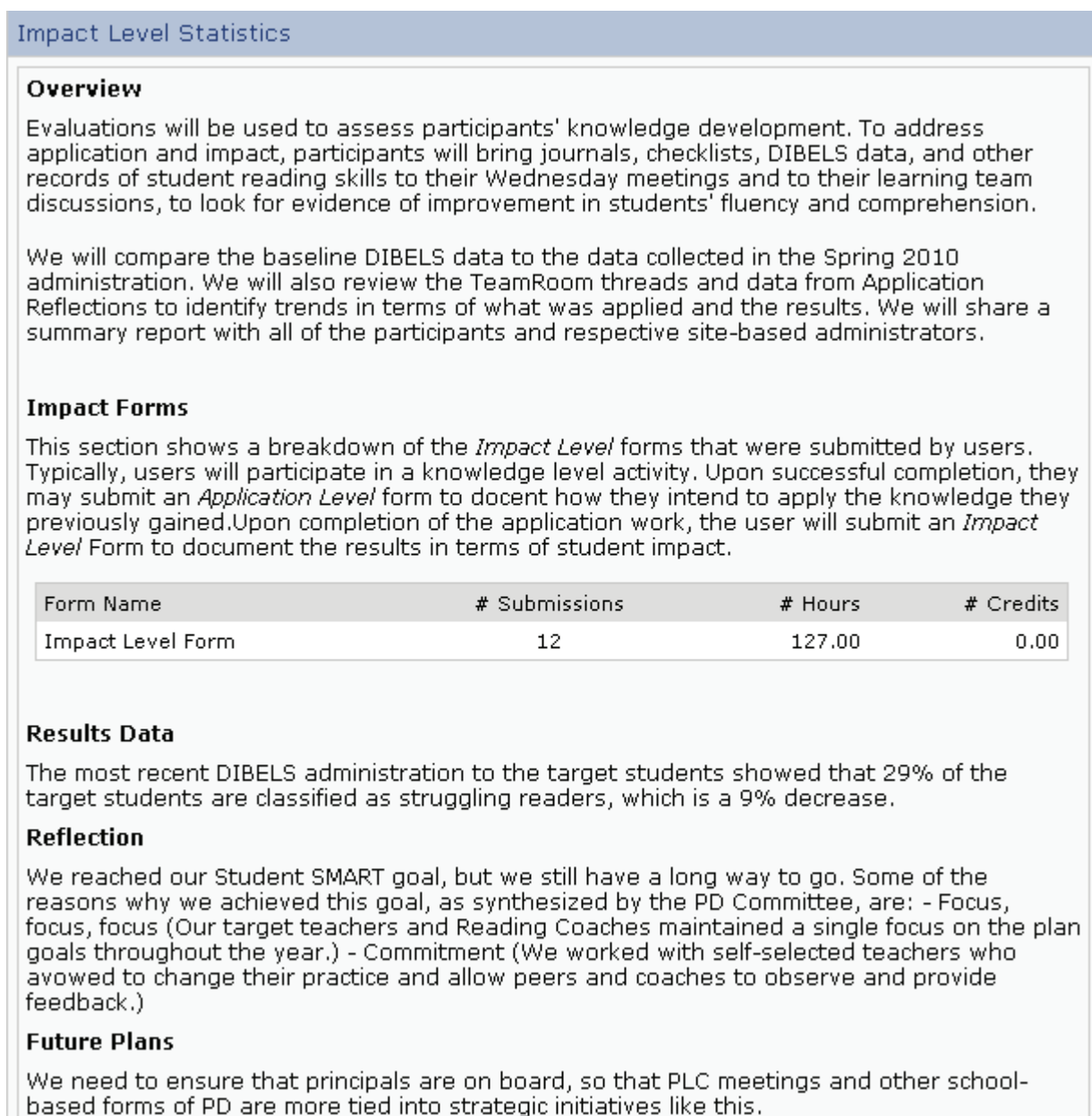


Figure 8: Impact Level Statistics

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